

Western Sydney Energy & Resource Recovery Centre Community start-up workshop

Purpose and background

A community workshop was held on Saturday 9 November, to engage with a broad cross section of the community that resided around the proposal site at 339 Wallgrove Road, to seek questions, ideas and feedback as part of the preparing the methodologies for the environmental assessment studies.

Cleanaway and Macquarie Capital hosted the community workshop from 9.30am to 2.30pm at the Alpha Hotel, Eastern Creek, with 31 community members and the following stakeholders in attendance:

- Hugh McDermott MP, Member for Prospect (for the first AM session)
- Donna Wallace, Manager Environment, Blacktown City Council
- Vincent Shepherd, A/Team Leader Environmental Health, Blacktown City Council
- Antony Lewis, Blacktown District and Environment Group

27 people were recruited to attend from the local community, who live in a mix of suburbs within a 7-8 km radius of the proposed site, from Blacktown, Fairfield, Penrith and Cumberland Council areas including Abbotsbury, Bossley Park, Cecil Park, Eastern Creek, Erskine Park, Horsley Park, Minchinbury, Mount Vernon, St Clair, and Wetherill Park.

The workshop is a part of community engagement activities that also include door knocking, briefings for stakeholders, shopping centre pop-ups, advertisements and many informal conversations with community members.

Workshop objectives

The objective of the start-up workshop was to discuss the project with the community and the concerns that they would like to see addressed in the environmental assessment process and clearly communicated back to the community:

- To understand the key issues from recruited, broad cross-section of the local community
- To seek feedback on the best channels to communicate with the community and priority content and information. The workshop discussed with participants the best approaches to local community engagement.
- To further refine the communication and engagement plan
- To provide feedback on the output from the workshop and the refined plan to various stakeholders
- To use the workshop findings as an input to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – what issues would the community like to be addressed in the proposal?

Workshop process

During the workshop, a short presentation was followed by table discussion and questions. The workshop comprised an interactive mix of table discussions, break-out groups, whole workshop discussions, and ideas polling using mobile phones (with results shown live on the screen).

This approach explored unprompted knowledge and perceptions of waste management, and early impressions of energy-from-waste, before going on to present information on the proposal and to discuss the issues in a more informed context.

It allowed time for information, questions and meaningful engagement. Participants understood and responded to the information presented.

Overall, the objectives of holding the start-up workshop were met. A good cross section of the community attended and raised a range of detailed issues. The proposal's merits were strongly discussed.

Community engagement

Overall, the facilitators understood a very strong desire for more community engagement.

In the workshop participants indicated an initial lack of trust regarding the role of community engagement in this process. People expressed concerns that Cleanaway were proceeding, regardless of community concerns and without addressing questions. A few participants reported of their experience of a past poor engagement with a previous energy-from-waste proposal, which negatively coloured their perception of this technology and proposal.

During the five-hour session it was observed that the participants wanted to be engaged on the details of the proposal. Participants reported that they would like to see future community engagement that aims:

- To explain the process of planning and approving the centre
- To address participant concerns that *"we are a long way progressed"* and that community engagement at this stage is still worthwhile
- To ensure proposal planning transparency
- To explain why this site, in this location (a lot of people felt at the conclusion of the workshop that this was not explained satisfactorily). For example, *"why the location is not west of the Blue Mountains?"*
- To provide more evidence on the benefits of the proposal, and human safety
- To provide a clearer explanation in regard to the issue of climate change – this was especially a concern for young people
- To explain the proposal in relation to our current recycling initiatives. This is to ensure the community doesn't think the proposal is a replacement for recycling. Most importantly of all - recycling is still to be encouraged.

Participants particularly stressed that information should also focus on:

- The project's risks – participants were looking for an honest conversation about *"what the risks are"*
- A clear description of how this is different to the previous proposal from Dial A Dump Industries (DADI) proposal, that was not approved. As part of this topic it was noted that participants would be keen to see Blacktown Council's response to this proposal.

To understand the proposal, participants discussed the benefits of being able to see both inside and outside some similar overseas energy from waste centres, as part of communications materials.

Participants also provided useful feedback on what communication channels they thought the community were likely to engage with:

- Young people noted that they will read relevant articles they come across, and may do their own research on Google, but would like to see more about the project on social media and in local

spaces, such as pop-ups, community newspapers or newsletters, local radio and future workshops.

- Middle aged people would like to see a town hall meeting, live online discussions, and community forums.
- Older people would like to hear about the project through mainstream channels such as television, radio and (some) social media.

Some participants liked the idea of the consortium paying an independent expert to give them a plain English judgement on the science and health impacts of the proposal. An option was for the Consortium to appoint an individual panel (environmental specialists) to investigate Cleanaway's performance and transparency on the project and to advise the community. Some of the younger group felt that advisors and scientists should not be paid by Cleanaway.

Questions and issues raised in the workshop

Participants raised a wide range of issues and questions during table discussions, in the Q&A session following presentations and in the online (phone) engagement tool used in the workshop. Broadly, these included how the centre would operate; the air emissions and how the air emissions would be cleaned before leaving the centre; potential community health impacts and community safety; the chosen location of the centre – and why this location was preferred; and what benefits for the local community would be created by the proposal.

Questions were raised regarding potential odour and how odour would be controlled; the potential impacts of increased traffic within the local area; how the centre would look; what sorts of jobs would be created; and questions about other similar facilities overseas.

Participants discussed the ways in which they thought the community would engage on the project. Participants expressed a clear desire for a commitment by Cleanaway to continued, clear community engagement throughout the planning process. Specific questions are detail below.

General questions

There were some general questions that respond to the materials published by Cleanaway on the proposal.

- What do we mean by a smart city solution?
- How can this facility be a smart city solution?
- How does it work? Explain the smart city solution concept.
- Why does the facility need to be in an urban area?
- Is burning waste a quick term solution – than spending money to find a long-term solution?

Questions are collated against topics in the following table.

Topic	Participant questions and information needs
<p>Choice of this location</p>	<p>Questions about the location of the proposal at 339 Wallgrove Road included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Why is energy-from-waste not located away from the city? ◆ What other locations were examined? ◆ How will Western Sydney benefit from this choice of location? <p>Younger people were skeptical about the choice of location and wanted to know more about the justification for the location and if Western Sydney was being made “a scapegoat again”.</p> <p>Middle aged people wanted a justification for the location, and to know why it was going to be located close to families and residents.</p> <p>Older people were concerned about the residents that live close to the plant and their long-term exposure to the potential air pollution.</p> <p>Throughout the presentations most agreed with what had been said but it was not adequately addressed “why this location?”</p> <p>Some felt that the location was decided in terms of profit to Cleanaway - regarding reduced transportation costs.</p> <p>Requested information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ More case studies (including from Australia). ◆ A clear explanation of why this location was chosen and not elsewhere. ◆ Why wasn’t the centre placed in a rural location? ◆ What suburbs would be serviced by this centre?
<p>Questions relating to the source of waste to be processed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Will the centre only service Western Sydney? ◆ Could the centre be expanded to service the whole city?
<p>Air quality and health impact</p>	<p>Participants had questions around the extent of impact to the community.</p> <p>Participants questioned the issue of location and Western Sydney temperature inversions. They noted the lack of coastal breezes making this location problematic.</p> <p>They wanted to see international case studies that show how air quality standards are currently being met by similar centres.</p> <p>Young people wanted an in-depth, clear explanation about the science that informs the Centre and its design.</p> <p>Middle aged people wanted to know if there would be changes in air quality that may affect children’s allergies.</p>

Topic	Participant questions and information needs
	<p>Older people were concerned with the potential pollution and health effects on the community.</p> <p>Some participants were concerned if Cleanaway was telling the truth about health effects and whether independent verification was possible.</p> <p>Requested information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Clearer case studies that show how standards are met in other projects. ◆ Fact checks around the air quality and health by a third-party group and the EPA, not by Cleanaway, were requested. ◆ Explanation of potential health impacts, including the issue of ‘trapped air’ in Western Sydney. ◆ An explanation of the filtration system to be used and the percentage of air that will be cleaned. ◆ Case studies from overseas about a long-term health effects on the residents living close to the facilities.
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ By how much would methane be reduced (if this waste was going to landfill)? ◆
Traffic impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ How much traffic will be generated by the proposal? ◆ Will there be more trucks? <p>Younger and older people did not prioritise concerns about traffic.</p> <p>However, middle aged people noted strong concerns about increase in traffic. One participant noted the proximity of the centre to the M7 Motorway & requested that fatal accidents on the motorway be investigated.</p>
Visual impact (appearance)	<p>The appearance of the Centre was not a strong concern in the younger or older group.</p> <p>The middle-aged group prefers the plant to be out of sight. The visible steam doesn’t seem to be ideal and looks like an outdated technology.</p> <p>The middle-aged group expected the relocation of the plant further away from the residential areas.</p>
Odour impact	<p>Odour was also not a strong concern in the younger or older groups.</p> <p>The middle-aged group were concerned it will add to the odour in the area. Is there any way the incinerator can minimise the odour in the area - including from the landfill?</p>
Jobs creation	<p>Younger people were glad to hear it creates opportunities but were somewhat skeptical about the true benefits to the locals – “we hear this every time”.</p> <p>Middle aged and older groups were more positive that it would create jobs.</p> <p>What kind of jobs would it create?</p>

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Electricity Generation	<p>The younger people wanted to know if the electricity generated would be kept in Western Sydney.</p> <p>Younger people wanted to know the detail of classifying this as 'clean' energy.</p> <p>The middle aged and older groups thought that this was great, if there are benefits to local residents, and were overall happy that it will generate electricity for homes.</p> <p>The project to explain where the power will go and the potential cost-savings benefits</p> <p>Questions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ How will Cleanaway sell the energy? ◆ How is the electricity fed into the grid?
Costs and benefits	<p>A discussion of costs and benefits occurred throughout the day. Participants asked:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Who benefits from the proposal and how? ◆ How will Western Sydney benefit? ◆ Will the energy be provided as a direct benefit? ◆ What will be the reduction in waste management costs? ◆ Will councils receive discounts? ◆ Will local rates be discounted? ◆ Will there be rate reductivity for consumers? ◆ What are the benefits to Cleanaway? ◆ What will Cleanaway charge the government? ◆ What will be the cost to taxpayers?
Community Engagement	<p>Participants were skeptical initially but do want to see more community engagement.</p> <p>Glad they came and were involved, but the communication of the proposed methods could have been better executed.</p> <p>All plans look reasonable. Participants expressed concern about people's changing perspective on recycling. There must be an ongoing engagement about recycling to ensure the community doesn't rely on the waste-to-energy services and to prevent a decreased rate of waste diversion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Need to explain where the power will go and the cost-savings benefits. ◆ How will Cleanaway sell the energy? If sold back to the grid how can local residents' benefit? Or receive discounts? -or even public spaces? ◆ How the electricity will be fed back into the grid? <p><i>Ideas for engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mixed opinions were received regarding the project door-knocking approach so far.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Social media is a good way of engaging – Some would rather go online and watch a video rather than face-to-face discussions. However, others didn't think social media is a good way to engage. ◆ Mixed understanding of the upcoming citizens panel. ◆ Liked the shopping centre approach. ◆ Easier communication and pop-up stalls in shopping centres will be helpful for the older generation as they have less access to the media than the youth. ◆ Community forums. ◆ Town hall meeting. ◆ Although others thought people are too busy to go out to a community forum etc. ◆ Online live discussion might be more open, transparent and people can get more information. ◆ Recommended to involve unpaid independent experts - liked the idea of an independent expert view. ◆ Participants noted they would like a follow-up after the workshop.
<p>Centre operations</p>	<p>Participants wanted to know about any alternative options for recycling / reusing the water vapour as treated water.</p> <p>A complete percentage breakdown of where the waste goes was requested.</p> <p>Specific community questions were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Is burning waste similar to burning coal? ◆ Will plastic be burnt as feedstock? ◆ What proportion of the feedstock is plastic? ◆ How is the waste actually converted to electricity? ◆ What is the 0.1% by product in air emission? ◆ What will occur with nearby landfill facilities on Wallgrove Road? ◆ How small particle size will the filtration occur? ◆ What filters will be used? ◆ Does the facility have an expected expiration date? If so, what measures will be put in place thereafter? ◆ Further, can the existing waste in those landfills be processed in the centre? ◆ In regard to the remnant waste there were several questions: ◆ Where does the remnant pollution go? Is it contained? Is it buried deep in the ground? ◆ Is the remnant waste radioactive? Where does it go? ◆ Is there a connection between the areas that the centre is servicing, with energy savings?

Topic	Participant questions and information needs
Overseas examples and best practice energy-from-waste	Community questions related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Have they stopped approval of similar incinerators in Europe? If so, why? ◆ Why is the UK pressuring the EU prior to Brexit to loosen the standards for [air] pollution? ◆ What other similar centres are located in the southern hemisphere? ◆ What other scientific studies can people read?

Next steps

The consortium committed to providing a summary of the discussions to each participant if they requested it; and to the proposal website <https://energyandresourcecentre.com.au/>.

Some participants indicated they wanted to be engaged further on the project.

Further community engagement will take place as we move into 2020 and this future engagement will take into consideration the above recommendations by the workshop attendees. The consortium will continue to ensure information is available to community through a variety of mediums as requested. More pop-ups and door knocking will be organised across Western Sydney suburbs, the dedicated website will be updated regularly with relevant and related information, and social media will be utilised to aide convenient access to project information. Additional engagement suggestions will be strongly considered and implemented if feasible.